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The Gates of Utterance



Cladys Cromwell



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The Gates of Utterance and Other Poems

BY
GLADYS CROMWELL



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TO
ANNE DUNN

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE GATES OF UTTERANCE	1
THE RIDERS	2
COMPENSATION	3
REALITY	4
THE BAT	5
THE AUDIENCE	7
TO FRANCE	10
APPROACH	12
DEFINITION	13
EMBLEMS	14
THE POET'S THRIFT	15
SOLICITUDE	16
ASPIRATION	17
JOY	18
EDUCATION	19
EVIDENCE	20
PROGRESSION	21
INTUITION	22
KINDRED	23
RESIGNATION	24
SOLACE OF SEASONS	25
THE FOUNTAIN	26
THE THRESHOLD	27
THE HERMIT	28

	PAGE
INTERPRETATION	29
VICTORY	30
THE HYPOCRITE'S REWARD	31
TESTIMONY OF HANDS	32
THE ASCETIC'S VINDICATION	33
TRANSMISSION	34
PREPARATION	35
EGYPT	36
DUSK	37
CONFLICT	38
TO THE CROWD	39
AUTUMN	40

THE GATES OF UTTERANCE
AND OTHER POEMS

THE GATES OF UTTERANCE

THERE is a throng within the gates,
A pressing, diverse throng;
Without, a peaceful throng awaits,
To which I would belong.

Within the gates the varied folk
Advise discordantly;
Without, the poet-crowds convoke
To council harmony.

Within the gates are all the heights
And depths of serried powers;
But when a lyric theme invites,
I reach out-lying bowers

Where dwell the bards of quiet years;
I join my song to theirs;
My glad, unfettered spirit hears
The melody it shares.

THE RIDERS

You look askance at me.
Do you take my horse
For Pegasus? Of course
He steps like Poetry,
But he's a quiet beast.
I think I hear you say
You don't like in the least
His fleet-footed way.

But your light flitting mare
Skins the meadows too.
Her nimble feet pursue
The stony dales, dare
The sloping pastures, leap
The brooks. You do the things
I do in dreams, asleep —
(Pegasus has wings)!

You canter wide-awake.
Your mare is real; my steed
Imaginary. Need
You then suspect me? Take
The cloud-rack by my side!
Partners, Life and Art,
Adventurers, we ride
To rhythms in heaven's heart.

COMPENSATION

You never told me, never, yet I know
You hold a sadness in disguise, unseen
Behind the days and years that intervene
Since you renounced ambition long ago.
Whence comes the tender love that you bestow
To feed our loves? Behind your self serene
There burns a golden passion,— how you screen
With radiant life the flame you must forego!
Then you assume our love is ample meed,
Atonement,— oh! I wonder any deed
Of ours can ease your spirit's lassitude,
Or lift your lonely heart! Our stars elude
Your sun that made them bright — your solitude.
Deprived, no boon avails to fill your need.

REALITY

WHAT things are real?
This falling, falling rain,
This garden where
My flowers droop again?

Or simply dreams,
Dreams asleep in me
Until I join
Their silent company?

THE BAT

OVER the river of sorrow
Spread thy drab wings wide.
Cool is the river. Glide
Between the trees. Borrow
The prudent feet of the fleeing
Beast. Thy pinions blend
With leaves. O thou All-Seeing,
Be night's obedient friend!

To a gloomy bat, all sorrow
Is cool and sombre and sweet.
So no wonder thou fearest to meet
The feline light of to-morrow.
When out from the east a glimmer
Of twilight corals thy wings,
Thy vision grows dimmer and dimmer,
Thou dreamer of dusky things!

When morning comes out from the east,
Advancing with stealthy ray,
Thy wheeling wings betray
Thy presence, Bird-and-Beast,
Soaring to dismal bowers
With smoke-like motion. Gladness,
Flame-like, heaps through the hours
Thine ashen sorrow and sadness.

Blinded by noon-day splendour,
Unseeing till darkness return,
Thy cinereous pinions yearn
For stone-colored night. Surrender
Thy spirit. Is not the sighing
Monotony sweet? Maybe
Creation is what we call dying,
As daylight is darkness to thee.

THE AUDIENCE

INTENTLY leans the avid sage
We name The Audience. His mood
Invites a vigorous prelude
Of sound, the silence to assuage,—

The silence in sequestered sources
Of his being. (Albeit his mind
And soul and heart may be like wind-
Awakened rivers in their courses.)

In clear, attenuated line,
The violin a theme avers.
It is this theme as it recurs
That forms the plenary design,—

This theme, which the composer's love
Could never deal with twice the same;
Submissive cellos now proclaim
It; louder clarions above

Now give it wise embellishment.
In unsuspected ways, all strings
And pipes resume it, altering
Their rhythms to be more eloquent.

The strange, concurrent harmonies
Provoke The Audience to pleasure,
Lead by phrase and clustered measure
To the peace of cadences.

The Audience thinks in terms of tone;
The curious intellect pursues
The flowing lines and shadowy hues
Of sound, akin to sculptured stone;

Mind estimates. But in between
The mind and soul an interim
Is brimmed with intonations dim:
The soul itself is left serene.

Who can express what music is
To soul? A cloud becomes cascade
And stirs a river winter-weighed
With frost. The massive images

Of mountains, on whose purple ground
The falling water carves a line
Of white, as narrow and as fine
As winter floods when first unbound,

Remind one of the soul when sound
Traverses it. Music is spring
To soul, April's awakening,
A freedom and a peace profound.

But what is music to the heart?
A trouble, a vicissitude,
A dream no cadence will conclude.
In it the surging sounds of Art

Stay ever unresolved. They are
Beginning only, origin,
Inchoate symphony within
A symphony of sky and star.

There is no answer, thus and thus,
That present players can impart
To the long-listening, searching heart;
But answers multitudinous.

The avid sage, The Audience,
Is wrapped in his own silence dim.
The mind, the soul, the heart in him
Observe the circling consonance

Of chords. These grow more intricate
Each time they are resumed, and still
One chosen theme the tones fulfill,
One motion they delineate.

So God reveals Himself to me.
I am His audience; I hear
With mind and soul and heart, His clear,
Progressive theme perpetually.

TO FRANCE

OH, still I dream of thee, my France! The sun
Irradiates thy meadows. Stalks of grain
And aureate beams infusing them are one.
There is a harmony that links thy plain
To quiet skies; that weaves a slender chain
Of living vine with wavering light. Where cease
Thy level spaces, hills dim clouds detain;
And in thy south, where seasons find increase,
The sheaves, like kneeling women, praise thy
peace.

Unwilling and reluctant are my dreams,
To recognize transforming destinies.
I dream of thee, my France; of mellow beams
That ripen happiness; of ample skies
That frame thy far perspectives. Meadows rise
To them by poplar spans. Upon thy ways
I see the cross. The gentle Saviour dies
With arms athwart the cloud. As heavenly
rays
Touch earth, His love a sense of light conveys.

Is happiness no more than a disguise,
A sheathing dream reality must wear?
If so, away with joyful mockeries!
My France, in desolation thou art fair.
Thy trampled poppies and thy fields laid bare
Express a beauty that prosperity

Concealed. Thy joys are fallen; fate would
spare

No ornament of peace. But I can see
The strange unfolding of thy destiny.

I love thee, and would know thee as indeed
Thou art. No scythe, a sword embraces wheat.
The poplars on thy margin seem to heed
No more the wind that made their stems throb
sweet

As lyre strings. The stars alone entreat.
Thy vine is severed and thy grape is blood;
Thy sheaves are souls. Thy rising meadows
meet

The sky like surging waves of a dark flood,
And shadow closes every quickening bud.

My France, my France, in darkness I begin
To know the light that only faith can shed
Upon thy ways. As joy and beauty win
Through death, so thou shalt win. Art thou
not fed,

Though fields are bare, with spiritual bread?
The star-strewn shadow crowns and dignifies
Thy young, submissive God of the bowed head.
How newly does thy sorrow harmonize
With His, whose loving arms enfold the skies!

APPROACH

APPARELLED in a mask of joy till now,
I knew thee not. Asleep, I see thy face
More simply. Sorrow's leisure lets me trace
The nicer lines. Thy sealèd lids, thy brow,
Thy lasting posture, purposes avow ;
In thy spent form resides a moveless grace.
A pageant was thy life, and in its place
I find a truth to feed and to endow
My heart. Thy wonted mask of joy belied
The meaning death's bare attitude makes clear.
From living gesture thought went often wide,
And I was poor interpreter ; but here,
Where it would seem our thoughts anew divide,
The steady silence draws thy spirit near.

DEFINITION

As clouds lie in the west,
My fairest pleasures rest
In you, their element
Of being. Loath to die,
They ornament your sky,
Amassed, magnificent.

They shun the realms beyond.
Are you not their fond,
Fair dwelling by consent
Of time? Why should they go
And vanish quite, as though
They were not all-content?

My pleasures are not love,
Else like the clouds above
They swiftly would relent.
They are mild beauty; dim,
Resistless thought; and whim,
And idle blandishment.

Love is a wilful power,
More like the wind or shower
In which the cloud is spent.
My pleasures only screen
The space of light serene
In your deep firmament.

EMBLEMS

WHERE sweet ferns blow, where hemlock shadows lie,
Where peaks of pine o'er oak-twined branches reach,
In groves where bend the poplar and the beech,
Where emerald willows touch the emerald sky,
They come to us, the Lost Ones. Far and high
The winds among the trees lift muffled speech,
And tell the hidden past; we question each
Entreating form those winds identify.
Below the hill they huddle stone by stone,
The lost ones and the loved ones we have known,
Who followed, fearless, ways where beauty led;
But here upon the hilltop, winds intone
The foregone past. Oh, let us think instead,
The living trees are emblems of our dead.

THE POET'S THRIFT

My landscape only need comprise low hills,
For these are eminent and limitless
To me. They mean more than my dreams ex-
press ;
They mean more than my word or deed fulfils.
The slender trees, the tuneless whip-poor-wills,
Impart quite ample themes to loneliness.
I find enough in scant elusiveness
Of springs and little brooks. My spirit thrills
To beauty, unprepared for the sublime.
I wonder, though, when I shall be completed
Even to transcribe these hills? Sometime
This landscape in few lines will show to me
The subtle mysteries I have entreated,
In the simple realm of poetry.

SOLICITUDE

To me, your transport is a dim surmise,
A vague, imagined bliss. But I will brace
Myself to life; though languid for the chase,
Will gird my grief. Where your swift pleasure
flies —

Beneath whatever mirth-alluring skies —
I'll follow, lest you pause in darkling space.
Oh, let me gather stars, and turn your face
To these, lest, meeting night, you breathe faint
sighs!

Is joy illusion? This, in sooth, is clear,—
The pause of weariness; and should I hear
You drop a single sombre semi-tone
From Paradise, I'd gather every star;
For I divine what it must be to mar
This wonder that my breast has never known.

ASPIRATION

THOUGH my frail soul should never touch again
The semblance of reality like this ;
Through periods of time should always miss
The imprint of true life ; nor find the plain,
Familiar mould of being ; still not vain
Are those desires that frame undying bliss.
The sky is not a vanishing abyss
To me, but steadfast beauty, sheathing pain.
I live in confidence. As planets turn
About the sun, continually I yearn
To God. His interpenetrating fire
Is all I need. Though heaven prove mockery,
My life ascends by dint of sheer desire,
Imbued with hopes of immortality.

JOY

How shall I make of joy discovery?
For is it not an orbit that enspheres
The heart? Like misty heaven, as one nears,
The circuit spreads; and like the flowing sea
Whose waves evolve a scroll of mystery,
Its vague development eludes the seers.
It is a garment like the shrouding years,—
A dusky shield, a cloudy canopy,
Illumined by the soul that stands beneath.
It must forever amplify, deploy,
Give spirit space,— that's all I know of joy.
It is a hovering defense, a sheath,
In which the spirit comes to flowering,
A folding and a cool enfolded wing.

EDUCATION

I HAD lived many years when first I met
What men call Sorrow. I had long conceived
A semblance of it, thought I had achieved
That magnitude, when side by side I set
My lonely days. I knew the alphabet
Of Life's experience, and I believed
That when I touched another's grief, I
grieved; —

But when at last I was myself beset,
I marveled. Little had I known. They told
Me and they showed me death, but finally,
Like shifting clouds no foresight can explain,
I felt the changeful years envelop me.
I was not loath to meet at last with pain,
But oh! to feel the youth my age could hold!

EVIDENCE

IF there is any one device to show
Me God, by which His aim is apprehended,
Is it not forgiveness? You extended
Zones of lovelier truth a while ago,
My friend, when you considered me as though
I had not been unfaithful, nor offended
The deep love in which our lives are blended.

Yes, by your acquittal I forego
Mistrust. Your pardon is the pledge of powers
By which we rise to new degrees of being.
Now I read the crucifix that sealed
The years. Your loving-kindness has revealed
The symbol. The significance is ours.
We take the step from symbol on to seeing.

PROGRESSION

THE resonance of wind and wave
Is put to music by the tide;
So passion modulates to verse,
And moves in rhythm's quiet stride.

The bards in realms enchanted hold
Familiar converse, like the birds;
Repeat emotion, improvise,
Sustain the fundamental words,—

Until, forsaking pastorals,
They must pursue Life's ampler prose,—
A continuity of song
The heart's experience only knows.



INTUITION

RHYTHMS of exultation flow
In dusky regions far behind
The formal meadows of the mind.
Sighs waft syllables, as blow
The winds the grasses to and fro.

The shape of cloud, as thought effaces
Dream, eclipses the moon's lustre.
My winged stars, like swallows, cluster
In the deep enchanted spaces
That imagination traces.

KINDRED

WHAT inequality!
The apple trees and stones
Are kindred. Love, the stormy æons
Have made my spirit bleak and grey.

Like sun-emblazoned leaves
Or blossoms in the spring,
Your loveliness, o'ershadowing,
A garland for my spirit weaves.

RESIGNATION

THE dark house yonder is my life ;
It looms against the purple night ;
The windows are my stars ; I count
Them all,— each window one delight.

Oh! there are many stars above,
But mine in strong substantial woe
Are framed ; I cannot misconstrue
Life's dark intent, joy's fitful glow.

SOLACE OF SEASONS

COLD winter finds no word of condolence.
I laid my grief where pastures bright in spring
Bore panacea, with young life whispering ;
I laid my grief in summer by the side
Of a deep sea that brought a healing tide ;
When autumn came, I laid it in a cloud ;
The strong wind bore it in that balmy shroud :
Cold winter finds no word of condolence.

When skies above are bleak, I will not care ;
A flame I'll kindle for my chill despair,
A flame within my heart, for condolence.

THE FOUNTAIN

My garden fountain sings to-night,
Its margin is all moist with spray,—
That snow-white marble margin where
A white rose dreams of drooping day.

Upon the rose fall rhythmic drops,
Snow-cool from the pale fountain's crest,—
Drops cooler than the shadows when
The sun leads day-spring to the west.

Unto the rose, my fountain's rim
Is ample joy, while I, through tears,
Can see my garden growing dim,
And dream of sorrow's girding spheres.

THE THRESHOLD

I THREADED endless aisles
Of level trees, of spare,
Undeviating wood;
I penetrated streets
Of houses parallel;
I crossed a common where
My day paused sentinel;
At evenfall I stood
Before the dim defiles
Of dusk, where light retreats,
Immured in sombre ward.
The sheathèd sun went down;
Opaque was heaven's frown;
Mountains, looming grey,
Framed the threshold — yea —
The portal to the Lord.

THE HERMIT

I MARK the hermit's den,
And ponder why he fled
So far from other men ;
Why chose to make his bed
In lonely Nature's fen.

For surely he must tread
On yearnings even there ;
And he must see — outspread —
The vital branches bear
The burden of Christ dead.

INTERPRETATION

My flesh aspired to soul's vitality.
In mortal life's imperfect span
I read the stately spirit's plan,
Like scroll of cloud in heaven's immensity.

Deciphering, it seemed a baneful tryst,—
The flesh with radiant soul conferred
Until the purport of the Word
Was manifest.— The Word was even Christ.

VICTORY

WHAT are the friends of Jesus thinking,
As they see
Him crucified against the sky's
Blue mystery?

And Jesus, what can He be thinking
On the cross?
He looks upon the shadow throng
Whom passions toss.

They know a fervent exultation,
Like day-spring
Above their sorrow, and the promise
Of their King.

But Jesus, what can He be thinking?
Crown of thorns,
The memory of strife, His sovereign
Soul adorns.

THE HYPOCRITE'S REWARD

WHEN came his final judgment,
God gave him for his prize
The crown, the single sceptre,
He'd worn as his disguise.

The crown, the single sceptre,
A new, familiar shame ;
For when he came to judgment,
He wore them in God's name.

TESTIMONY OF HANDS

Is every day the judgment day?
A thousand mortals lift on high
A throng of hands that plead and pray;
Beneath a space of quiet sky,
Their several gestures testify.

Oh, mark the wistful hand that holds
A sorrow in its upturned palm;
The gentle hand that firmly folds
Across the breast to make it calm.
Oh, mark the hand by which the balm

Of youth was scattered, eloquent
As the grey leaf upon the tree
When summer's mellow joy is spent.
Above that throng of hands, oh, see
The Hand that plies eternity.

THE ASCETIC'S VINDICATION

How strange are we! — From pale St. Francis
down,

Our solemn joy, our pain,
Commanding, notable; our hearts, anon
Like flames no walls contain,
Anon like wings that search oblivion.

We make of time a pleading orison;
We pierce earth's dim domain;
We glance with eager eyes from faces wan;
We strive; we press; we gain;
We count not squandered strength. When life
is done,

Men shall affirm through us the Saviour shone.
We crave adventure; we attain,
Defying death, immortal benison.
“How strange you are, how vain!”
Phlegmatic minds assert in unison.

TRANSMISSION

A SHELL expressed the verity
In tones more limpid than the sea,—
Distilled the sea's infinity.

A mellow leaf disclosed the true
In more than sun's pellucid hue,
The sun was tinged in passing through.

A wing revealed the sky unseen,
Till motion made the air serene,—
A wing — a soaring life, I mean.

PREPARATION

A TIME will come when I shall breathe
New melodies to soothe and fold,
Like portions of a mellow sheath,
My sorrow. While my songs withhold
Their tones, I pause before the years;
I gaze on the gray world; I strive
To clear the mist of doubting tears.
— My songs, what music you'll derive
From silence in the time to come!

EGYPT

How still is Egypt, as a corpse's breast;
Her power is muffled, stone on stone;
The sinews of her kingdom lie at rest;
Her deserts wake no pulse's moan.

The Nile is like an adamantine sea;
Sky's cloud and star, like soundless flame;
The moon in silence mourns eternity,
And calls blind man with magic claim.

The hushed, impenetrable fear, the peace
Of wings, the palm's inwoven spray,
Are like death's pause before the soul's release
Into another golden day!

DUSK

As flowers at dusk their choicest perfumes hold,
Some hearts hoard beauty when the body's old:
I see an age-bent woman lead the herd
To pasture, with no need of guiding word.

While the dull beasts in the tall grasses browse,
Inside her soul the earth's enchantments drowse;
The needles pause between her wasted hands,
For light is always mellow where she stands.

No motion marks her life's harmonious dream;
It is a part of Nature's quiet theme.
Each day renews the uneventful past,
Although her spirit nears a change at last.

From the grey threshold of her silent home
One night, her spirit, kin to evening's shade,
Will float away from crevices life made,
Like seaweed from a cliff into white foam.

CONFLICT

DIVIDED by the dark,
Our foils converge. A spark
You kindled not, My Enemy,
A spark I never drew
From bitter fires that sear me through
and through,
Gleams fitfully.

That spark, that little light,
Is lit where foils unite.
It lives in spite of us, My Foe;
In intervening space,
This little eye that darts from place
to place
Sees clear, I know.

Opinions are not one,
And man's criterion
Is not in us. Between, above,
The cross that weapons frame,
My Adversary, gleams a truth whose
name
Might still be Love.

TO THE CROWD

WHEN I hold a budding pleasure
In my heart, can I diffuse it?
No; you want the musk full-measure,
Not the bud,— so you refuse it.

When I hold an ebbing sorrow,
Can I share the balm with you?
No; you want no lessening morrow,
But meridian's deepest hue.

Blossom of my joy completest,
Zenith of my sorrow's hour,
Yours. So I may keep the sweetest:
Buds and lees — ambrosial power.

AUTUMN

CAPRICIOUS little poem and sapling rhyme
Grew on the golden hillside of my youth.
The stanzas were as crooked and uncouth
As early things are wont to be. For time
Was pressing and mid-summer's glowing prime
Was ever imminent. Mysterious truth
Was the warm soil thought sprouted from.
Forsooth

My songs were stem and filament to climb.
But now, the memory of bud and fruit
And flower is weariness. This present week
In mid-September, wayward wild pursuit
Is over; youth fulfilled. How shall they seek
Beyond, unless from sunbeams in the skies
These listless leaves take warmer harmonies?





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